CommuNIqué

Issue number 157 **November 2011**

The newsletter of the Bahá'í Community in Northern Ireland

Northern Lights Cluster School
Saturday 26 November, Day of the Covenant
" 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Most Great Branch"
In the Students Union, Queens University Belfast

Dear friends,
We are delighted to announce plans for the first cluster school in Northern Ireland. This will be a one day school focussing on the life and example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The main speaker at the school will be Earl Redman. Earl has published a book on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and his contributions will prove inspiring to all. Everybody is welcome at this school.
To assist with arrangements it would be helpful if parents could let us know if they are bringing children. We are arranging a children's programme and a junior youth and youth programme. Further information will be going out on the Bahai-NI email list. Details are available from bcni@bahai.org.uk or 0777 9600 254. Programme details are on page 2.

Northern Lights Winter School

Lorne, Holywood, Co Down

Sat 31st December - Mon 2nd January

All Bahá'ís and their friends are warmly invited to this winter school. More details will be issued on Bahai-NI. For accommodation it is essential to register in advance. To register please contact bcni@bahai.org.uk, tel 0777 9600 254. The school will include inspiring sessions children's, junior youth and youth activities, drama and music.

Celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in Mullavilly

Nazy and Brian Harris are hosting their annual celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. This will be held in advance of the Holy Day on Saturday 5th November 3.00pm at their home. For more information contact bcni@bahai.org.uk, tel 0777 9600 254.

Residential Schools Committee

The website for the Northern Ireland Summer School 2011 has now served its purpose in helping to make the School the success it was. It has now been made over to
(a) look towards Summer School 2012 in July and will be updated as programme and arrangements develop and
(b) give a report with photographs on Summer School 2011 and share some of the feedback received from those attending. It can be visited at the following url: www.bahaisummerschool-ni.org.uk

"Is it not His love that spurs you on in the field of service and enables you to see in every soul the capacity to know Him and to worship Him?"
(The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010)

Dear friends
The Northern Lights Area Teaching Committee warmly invites you to the reflection meeting on Sunday 6th November 2011.

Venue: 67 Drumlin Road, Donaghcloney BT66 7NJ, Craigavon, Co Armagh
Time: 10.30am start (10am tea/coffee). Lunch together at the conclusion of the reflection meeting. There will be separate classes for children.

Friends, "as currently conceived, an intensive programme of growth is straightforward, simple and effective, but implies a level of exertion that tests the resolve of the friends….."

"The expansion phase, often a period of two weeks, demands the highest level of intensity. Its objective is to widen the circle of those interested in the Faith, to find receptive souls and to teach them. Although this phase might include some element of proclamation, it should not be seen as a time to hold a few events for this purpose or to undertake a set of activities that merely convey information. Experience suggests that the more closely teaching approaches and methods are aligned with the capacity acquired from the study of the institute courses the more rewarding the results." (27 December 2005 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors)

The expansion phase will run from November 12th - 27th. Any of the friends wishing to consult about the expansion phase or other with the ATC please do get in touch with the secretary Afnan at <afnaninho@gmail.com> or <07789342613>.
Warmest regards
Northern Lights Area Teaching Committee

Northern Lights

Cluster School
Saturday 26th November

9.30-10.00 ARRIVAL
10.00-10.30 Devotional
10.30-11.30
" 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Example of the Master"
Earl Redman
11.30-12.00 BREAK
12.00-13.00
" 'Abdu'l-Bahá's vision for the 21st Century"
How does it relate to society and our personal lives? Interactive discussion facilitated by Danny O'Brien
13.00-14.00 LUNCH
14.00-15.30
Visit to Botanic Gardens and Ulster Museum
Guided by Patrick Boyle
15.30-16.00 BREAK
16.00-17.15
" 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Example of the Master"
Earl Redman
17.30-18.00 Musical Devotional
18:00-19:00 Social time

The Youth Weekend

19th - 23rd August

Claudy

Luke Slott in Northern Ireland

Two reports from Queens University Belfast, Bahá'í Society...

A Musical Journey

It's a Friday night at the start of the academic year in Queen's. The Union is buzzing with excited teenagers sweating in the Mandela hall and drinking in the Speakeasy; but there's a very different kind of buzz above the adrenaline and testosterone that come with the sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll downstairs.

In Clubroom 2 on the top floor, a musician from Dublin is sharing his work with stories about the Faith that inspired it. We listen to him sing his prayers over beautiful finger-picked guitar melodies and we watch these same fingers dance along the keys of his piano, filling our ears, hearts, and souls with the beauty of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

A better introductory meeting to this year's QUB Bahá'í Society couldn't be imagined. Neither could a more vivid example of the integrative and disintegrative forces at work in our society be presented. "That day will the Cause spread like wildfire" The Guardian tells us, "when its spirit and teachings are presented on the stage or in art and literature".

Darragh Graham

Personal and spiritual

On a rainy autumn night in Belfast, if you happened upon one of the upper rooms of Queen's Student Union, above the hustle and bustle of the pubs below, you would have been taken on a journey. A personal journey of a young man and his faith. The man, a Dubliner named Luke Slott, was invited by Queen's University Bahá'í Society to give an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith. But those in attendance were rewarded with much more; a spiritual journey, through song and music that, while shared by all in attendance, provided each individual with a unique experience.

Luke has put to music haunting words of prayer over guitar accompaniment, with the floating melody of the piano adding another dimension to his performance. With his music, he introduced us to some aspects of God as he experiences them, allowing us a glimpse of his own personal journey. As well as listening to stories about the Bahá'í Faith, from its beginnings to the present day; we listened to stories of individual Bahá'ís and their quest to gain a deeper understanding of this world and of God. By drawing on the power of God to guide them, studying the words of Bahá'u'lláh, they seek out the path God has laid out for them.

For those present, this evening of music and prayer provided a welcome shelter – not just from the rain, but from the weight of life, to reflect on their faith. And to those not familiar with the Baha'i faith, it offered a chance to learn about its aims to create unity among all people and to hear some of the words of Bahá'u'lláh. To hear from a young Bahá'í, who draws on his faith and life experiences to provide beautiful music, was a privilege. We all left renewed with a sense of hope and love.

Ciarán Magee

A report from Newtownabbey

Luke Slott, a composer and musician from Dublin visited Northern Ireland over the weekend 30th September to 2nd October. Luke was born into a theatrical family. At the age of 12 he learnt jazz trumpet from his father, and after leaving school he became lead singer in the Irish Rock Band Melaton and toured for several years throughout Britain and Ireland. He first heard of the Faith from his brother, who was studying in Glasgow, and became a Bahá'í himself about four years ago. He has produced several CDs and is now supporting himself by his music.

To commemorate the Centenary of 'Abdú'l-Bahá's journeys and to promote the arts as an integral component of Bahá'í community life, he has offered a musical fireside tour. His offer was taken up by Queen's University Baha'i Society and the Baha'i communities of Newtownabbey, Bangor and Craigavon. Up to 30 people came to each performance of his 'Evening of Music and Stories from the Bahá'í Faith', a concert fireside presenting the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh using the story-telling practices learnt in Ruhi Book 4 and interspersed with original music and songs composed and performed by Luke himself. Luke's gentle music created a charming and relaxed atmosphere for people to learn about the Faith and was in general very successful and well received.

Early the next day Luke set off for a month long gruelling tour of Bahá'í communities across the water, working his way south from Glasgow and Edinburgh. He hopes to be back in Dublin by the end of October.

Abdu’l-Bahá – one hundred years

One hundred years ago, on 20th October 1911, Abdu’l-Bahá was in Paris after spending a month in the south of England. His greeting on that day is recorded in the following manner:

“I hope you are all happy and well. I am not happy, but very sad. The news of the Battle of Benghazi grieves my heart. I wonder at the human savagery that still exists in the world! How is it possible for men to fight from morning until evening, killing each other, shedding the blood of their fellow-men: And for what object? To gain possession of a part of the earth! Even the animals, when they fight, have an immediate and more reasonable cause for their attacks! How terrible it is that men, who are of the higher kingdom, can descend to slaying and bringing misery to their fellow-beings, for the possession of a tract of land!”

(Paris Talks, p. 28)

The reference to the Battle of Benghazi is a reference to a battle in the Italo-Turkish war. This war overturned the Ottoman Empire and is credited with having a significant influence, precipitating the beginning of the First World War. So Abdú’l-Bahá’s words can be read in retrospect not only as a comment about the needless loss of life in war, but as a clear warning of what was to come. This warning was repeated in many different contexts in the months following as Abdu’l-Bahá continued his travels through the West.

But Abdu’l-Bahá was not the first to warn of the threat of war. Bahá'u’lláh clearly foretold the consequences of war. A Tablet revealed to Kaiser Wilhelm I reads:

"O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory."

(The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah, p. 39)

In one of His Tablets written before the First World War 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that Bahá'u'lláh's reference to having seen the banks of the Rhine "covered with gore" related to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), and that there was more suffering to come.

And in a letter to Martha Root, in 1920, Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly warned of what was to come:

“Now since you are the servants of the world of humanity you must strive with your heart and soul, in order that the human world may be delivered from the darkness of material manhood and natural prejudices and attain to the light of the Divine World. Praise be to God, ye are informed of all the laws, commandments and principles. Today the world of humanity will not find peace and tranquility except through these teachings and this darkness will not, otherwise, be dispelled, these chronic diseases be cured. Nay, these would, otherwise, be aggravated from day to day. The Balkans will not rest, but become worse than before; the subjugated natives will not sit quiet, nay they will cling to every instrumentality until the flame of war will be rekindled. Now popular movements will concentrate their entire energy upon the realization of their aims. The northern movement (Russian Sovietism) will attain great importance and will be spread.”

(Abdú’l-Bahá, Letter to Martha Root)

So Abdu’l-Bahá had a clear understanding of the inevitability of the international conflicts that

were to beset most of the world in the early years of the twentieth century, but that did not prevent him from calling on governments to take action to avert the impending doom.

As we reflect on Abdú'l-Bahá's travels after one hundred years we cannot but fail to be struck by relevance of Abdú'l-Bahá's comments as we again see upheavals in North Africa and particularly in Benghazi. The coincidence of Abdu'l-Bahá's comments about the Battle of Benghazi being made on 20th October 1911 and the death of Colonel Gaddafi on 21st October 2011 is striking.

The peace statement issued by the Universal House of Justice in 1985 seems even more relevant: Whatever suffering and turmoil the years immediately ahead may hold, however dark the immediate circumstances, the Bahá'í community believes that humanity can confront this supreme trial with confidence in its ultimate outcome. Far from signalizing the end of civilization, the convulsive changes towards which humanity is being ever more rapidly impelled will serve to release the "potentialities inherent in the station of man" and reveal "the full measure of his destiny on earth, the innate excellence of his reality."

EG

In Memory of Violette Nakhjavani

It is very difficult to render tribute to a person so precious and outstanding as Violette Nakhjavani, who passed away last month.

She lived a life of service to the beloved Cause, blessed by the years of early pioneering in the continent of Africa and by the unique opportunity to be the tireless companion and devoted friend of the Hand of the Cause, Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, whom she loved and served so dearly. Words cannot sufficiently describe the manner in which Mrs Nakhjavani and Ruhiyyih Khanum courageously and steadfastly spread the Message of Baha'u'llah. They travelled thousands of kilometers – across villages, cities, countries and oceans – and lovingly encouraged individuals of all origins, race and creed, as well as strengthening their love for the Faith.

With deep love and high resolve, she stood in front of many audiences and enchanted them with her stories – told with such sweetness, dignity and nobility of character as to touch the innermost parts of the hearts of those listening, creating a magical atmosphere. A loving wife, and mother to two children, she was also a mother to many of the youth who would gather around to hear of her many journeys across Africa, Asia and the Pacific and her stories of the lives of the early believers. Her vitality of character, her twinkling eyes and sweet smile, her nobility and her love for different cultures inspired and infused enthusiasm into all who would cross her path. The admiration and love she had for the beloved Guardian whom she had the privilege of meeting shone as an example of steadfastness and firmness in the Covenant.

Diary dates

Fri 4th November

Feast of Qudrat

Sat 5th November

Celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh
At Mullavilly, Tandragee

Sunday 6th November

Northern Lights reflection meeting
in Donaghloney

Saturday 26th November

Northern Lights day school
in QUB Students Union, Belfast

Saturday 26th November

Day of the Covenant

Friday 28th November

Ascension of Abdu'l-Bahá

From the Council

Sometimes the development of core activities such as children's classes or junior youth groups can be delayed because of the difficulty of getting suitable venues. It is well worth considering the potential to use neighbourhood community centres. There have been occasions when community centres have been available free of charge for Bahá'í activities in places such as Short Strand, Ballybeen and Bangor.

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Many things can be said about Mrs Nakhjavani's life – about her devotion and love, her high resolve and strength, her courage and her humility. But perhaps the important thing to say is that she was a spiritual soldier who withstood difficulties and challenges, attained self-mastery and served steadfastly until her last breath. Mrs Nakhjavani touched the lives and hearts of many people and set a memorable example for posterity. As stated by the Universal House of Justice in a message regarding her passing, she was a "faithful, illustrious handmaiden of the Blessed Beauty … who has enriched the annals of the Cause and won … admirers in every quarter and across the generations".

By Noemi Robiati

CommuNIqué is published under the auspices of the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland.

CommuNIqué is also available on the web at:
www.bahaicouncilni.org.uk/comm.

Views expressed by the various contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, or of the Bahá'í Council for Northern Ireland or the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom.

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